UNITED
NATIONS

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General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/48/753
15 December 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Forty-eighth session
Agenda item 126

PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. Mahbub KABIR (Bangladesh)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 24 September 1993, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, decided to include in the agenda of its forty-eighth session the item entitled "Pattern of conferences" and to allocate it to the Fifth Committee.

2. The Fifth Committee considered the item at its 19th, 21st to 23rd and 35th meetings, held on 17, 19, 22 and 23 November and 10 December 1993. Statements and observations made in the course of the Committee's discussion of the item and replies to queries raised are reflected in the relevant summary records (A/C.5/47/SR.19, 21-23 and 35).

3. For its consideration of the item, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Committee on Conferences (A/48/32 and Rev.1 and Add.1); 1/

(b) Letters dated 20 September and 23 November 1993 from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences to the President of the General Assembly (A/48/416 and A/48/417 and Add.1);

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on the consolidated statement of scheduled special conferences for 1994 (A/C.5/48/1).

1/ To be issued in final form as Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/48/32/Rev.2).

II. CONSIDERATION OF DRAFT RESOLUTION A/C.5/48/L.8

4. At the 35th meeting, on 10 December, following informal consultations, the coordinator of those consultations, Mr. Mahbub Kabir (Bangladesh), introduced a draft resolution entitled "Pattern of conferences" (A/C.5/48/L.8).

5. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted draft resolution A/C.5/48/L.8 without a vote (see para. 7).

6. Before the adoption of the draft resolution, statements were made by the representatives of Austria and the United States of America (see A/C.5/48/SR.35).

III. RECOMMENDATION OF THE FIFTH COMMITTEE

7. The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Pattern of conferences

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The General Assembly,

Having considered the report of the Committee on Conferences, 2/

Recalling its relevant resolutions, including resolutions 43/222 B of 21 December 1988, 46/190 of 20 December 1991 and 47/202 of 22 December 1992,

1. Approves the draft calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for the biennium 1994-1995 as submitted and amended by the Committee on Conferences; 3/

2. Authorizes the Committee on Conferences to make adjustments in the calendar of conferences and meetings for 1994 that may become necessary as a result of action and decisions taken by the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session;

3. Invites the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund and the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme to increase their efforts to rationalize their meeting and documentation requirements with a view to reducing them to the maximum extent possible;

2/ A/48/32 and Rev.1 and Add.1.

3/ A/48/32/Rev.1, annex I.

4. Also invites the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund and the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme to consider dispensing with summary records;

5. Welcomes the decision of the Committee on Conferences to continue to monitor the conference services provided to organs and programmes not funded from the regular budget of the United Nations with a view to identifying cost savings;

6. Endorses the efforts of the Committee on Conferences to improve the utilization of conference-servicing resources, and takes note of the Committee's decision in paragraph 23 of its report 2/ to raise the benchmark figure to 80 per cent, pending further analysis of the expanded methodology;

7. Welcomes the decision of the Committee on Conferences to continue the experimental methodology in respect of the utilization of conference-servicing resources, and requests the Secretariat to expand the information presented to include analyses of trends and figures on the utilization of conference-servicing capacity;

8. Endorses the decision of the Committee on Conferences to request its Chairman to consult on its behalf with the chairmen of organs concerned, where the utilization factor is lower than the established benchmark figure applicable for the last three sessions, and requests the Committee on Conferences to report the results of the consultations to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session;

9. Urges those bodies whose utilization factor is below the applicable benchmark figure for the last three sessions to review and consider reducing the amount of conference-servicing resources requested;

10. Recommends that the measures to ensure optimum utilization of conference services contained in annex II to the report of the Committee on Conferences 2/ be implemented as applicable by all subsidiary organs in order to achieve the most efficient and effective use of conference-servicing resources;

11. Requests the chairmen of the relevant organs and subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly to propose to Member States, at the beginning of each session, the adoption of time-limits for speakers;

12. Welcomes the decision of the Committee on Conferences to play an informational role vis-à-vis subsidiary organs, providing clear directives to the Secretariat, setting standards and heightening awareness;

13. Renews its requests to the Secretariat, contained in paragraph 5 of its resolution 47/202 A, and paragraph 10 of its resolution 47/202 B, to bring to the attention of all organs information on the notional costs per hour of meeting time and on the notional cost per page of documentation;

14. Reiterates its view, expressed in section VIII of its resolution 44/201 A of 21 December 1989, on the desirability of the establishment of unified conference services at Vienna and, in this context, stresses that the

combined financial burden for providing conference services to the United Nations Office at Vienna and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization should, in the long run, benefit from the unification agreement, and urges the Secretary-General to conclude the negotiations with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization in that regard as quickly as possible and to report thereon to the General Assembly no later than at its forty-ninth session;

15. Notes with appreciation the system-wide coordination of conference activities and the agreement reached with regard to establishing a systematic exchange of information and language staff to promote effective utilization of conference staff;

16. Requests the Secretary-General, as Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, through the established mechanism of the Inter-agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications, to enhance that coordination, including coordination of meeting schedules, with a view to optimizing the use of available conference services, resources and facilities, with due regard to quality, and making possible the effective participation of Member States, and to report on the results achieved to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session through the Committee on Conferences;

17. Emphasizes that any decisions to convene world conferences should take into account the impact of such conferences on the capacity of the United Nations system to provide conference services and the capacity of Member States to participate in them;

18. Welcomes the benefits from the application of technological innovations to conference servicing, including gains in productivity and reductions in costs, and emphasizes that the primary goal of the introduction of new technology should be to enhance the quality of conference services and ensure their timely provision;

19. Reaffirms the general principle that, in drawing up the schedule of conferences and meetings, United Nations bodies shall plan to meet at their respective established headquarters;

20. Requests the Secretary-General to review the legal basis and experience of all subsidiary bodies that meet away from their established headquarters, thus constituting a departure from resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session through the Committee on Conferences;

21. Requests the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, when deciding upon its meeting schedule, including meetings away from Headquarters, to take into account the programme of work of the Fifth Committee;

22. Endorses the decision of the Committee on Conferences that in future its review of the proposed programme budget for conference services should be expanded to include conference services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and at the regional commissions.

B

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions on the control and limitation of documentation, including resolutions 33/56 of 14 December 1978, 36/117 B of 10 December 1981, 37/14 C of 16 November 1982, 45/238 B of 21 December 1990 and 47/202 B of 22 December 1992,

Reaffirming the need for and desirability of written meeting records for some bodies of a political or legal nature,

Considering, on the one hand, the effects of the introduction of technological innovations and, on the other, the increase in the workload and the reduced staffing in the Office of Conference Services,

1. Expresses concern at the late issuance and distribution of documentation, including summary and verbatim records of United Nations bodies;

2. Requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session, through the Committee on Conferences, an analytical report on the factors that contribute to this situation, including the increase in the workload of the Office of Conference Services, the level of staffing, workload standards, the late submission of documents by author departments and the effects of the introduction of technological innovations in the Office of Conference Services;

3. Encourages all bodies currently entitled to written meeting records to review the need for such records, particularly verbatim records, and to communicate their recommendations to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session;

4. Calls upon the Secretariat to strengthen planning and forecasting of parliamentary documentation in both author departments and the Office of Conference Services, and the training of those responsible for the preparation of parliamentary documentation in author departments;

5. Requests the Secretary-General to take all necessary measures to ensure that documents are submitted by author departments in compliance with the ten-week rule in order to permit processing in time in all official languages, and to include information on the impact of those measures in the report on compliance with the six-week rule requested in paragraph 9 of resolution 47/202 B;

6. Invites intergovernmental bodies and their members to review, as appropriate, their agendas with a view, inter alia, to combining agenda items and limiting requests for pre-session documentation;

7. Calls upon the Secretariat to provide the Office of Conference Services with adequate resources, especially technological resources, to enable it to respond to its increased workload and maintain a high standard of services, with due respect to the principle of equal treatment of the official

languages of the United Nations as laid down in resolution 42/207 C of 11 December 1987;

8. Expresses its deep concern regarding the economy measures announced by the Secretary-General on 26 August 1993 in the context of the financial crisis without prior consultation with Member States, those measures being in contradiction with the principle of equal treatment of the official languages of the United Nations as laid down in resolution 42/207 C;

9. Concurs with the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences, contained in paragraph 12 of the addendum to its report, 4/ that cuts in conference servicing introduced by the Secretary-General on 26 August 1993, and subsequently lifted in New York, be lifted also at Geneva and Vienna;

10. Endorses the letter from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences to the President of the General Assembly, contained in paragraph 136 of the report of the Committee, 2/ which reflects the opinions of the Committee on the economy measures announced by the Secretary-General.

4/ A/48/32/Rev.1/Add.1.